

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Nashville, Tennessee

Koinonia Farm, Americus, Ga.

Aug. 18, 1956

In this letter we will give you a report on events leading up to the present situation at Koinonia. As is well known throughout the South, there has been a severe reaction to the Supreme Court's ruling on segregation in public schools. This reaction has crystallized in the formation of White Citizens' and States' Rights Councils, whose objective is to maintain segregation by any means short of violence. On the other hand, there is a wide-spread desire among many white people for justice, brotherhood and democracy, and Negroes are coming into a new sense of dignity and power. The clash of these two opposing forces have charged the atmosphere with tension. The middle of the road is rapidly disappearing. It is a time of soul-searching decision for many people.

THE SPARK---For nearly 14 years Koinonia has sought to maintain a witness to Christian brotherhood in a powder-keg situation. There have been many ups and downs and difficult situations, but sooner or later things eased off. About four months ago Clarence Jordan was asked to sign applications of two Negro students who wished to enroll in the Ga. Business College (white). (The applications required the signatures of two alumni of the University system, and Clarence is an alumnus of the U. of Ga.) Accompanied by Harry Atkinson from Koinonia, Clarence went to Atlanta to interview the students and to talk with professors at Morehouse College and other interested persons. He found that the students were not seeking to make a test case, but actually wanted the training which they could not get anywhere else in Atlanta. Clarence and Harry then suggested to the students that instead of getting in line, as they had planned, with the white students and seeking to register, that they first talk the matter over with the president of the College and see if he could make some suggestion as to how they might get the same or equal courses. To this they agreed, so Clarence made an appointment with President Sparks for the next morning. Dr. Sam Williams, professor of Philosophy at Morehouse, and Rev. Jim Weldon, pastor of Oak Grove Methodist Church in Atlanta, and also an alumnus of the U. of Ga., went with Clarence and the students to talk with the president.

The group was received very graciously and found the president quite in sympathy with the problem. He called in the registrar to see if something could be done about enrolling the students, but the registrar said that the applications must be signed by two alumni of that particular institution, not the U. of Ga. (Up to this point Clarence had not signed the applications and because he now was disqualified, he never did sign them though the newspapers reported his doing so.) President Sparks seemed to sense that the signature requirement was a technical dodge, and suggested that we pursue the matter further by taking it up with the executive secretary of the Board of Regents. He then called the Secretary and made an immediate appointment for us.

Here again we were very kindly received. But the Secretary told us it was a big problem, and asked that we give him a few days to think it over. This was agreed upon, and he thanked us very profusely for the Christian spirit in which we had come. He was well aware that he could have had a situation on his hands similar to that when Miss Lucy sought enrollment at the U. of Alabama.

Harry and Clarence then returned to Americus, to find that Gov. Griffin had already called up the sheriff down here to find out about "this Jordan fellow" and what he was up to. The Americus Times-Recorder had head-lines to the effect that an Americus man, resident of Koinonia Farm, had signed applications of Negroes to Ga. Business College. This got everybody a little bit excited. Clarence began receiving threatening anonymous phone calls.

A few days later, the first insurance cancellation came through. Later all insurance was cancelled. Retail merchants, who had been handling our eggs for years, began dropping us. Practically all of our attractive, hand-made highway signs, advertising our Roadside Market, were pulled up and broken. We fixed them and put them back up. They were pulled down again. We put them back up. This continued until last week when they not only took them up but hauled them off. So temporarily, they've won.

Pistol shots were fired into the Roadside Market, located on U.S. 19, about 4 miles from the main farm, which is on Ga. 49. Shots were also fired into the community. No one has been hit.

THE INJUNCTION---For a number of years Koinonia has conducted each summer a Vacation Bible School which was attended largely by Negro children. Last year it was decided to try something more intensive, so a summer camp for children 8-12 was held. Though the facilities were quite inadequate, the camp was very successful, with about 30 children of both races attending.

This year we spent several thousand dollars expanding and improving the facilities. The camp was booked to capacity with an enrollment of 36. Last minute preparations were being made to get everything in readiness. Then on June 9, a few days before camp was to open, we were served with a court injunction restraining us from having the camp. The injunction was brought by the County Health Department on "health and sanitation" grounds. A hearing was set for July 2.

Meanwhile the County Health Engineer made a complete inspection of both the camp and the farm. He did not find such things as the injunction mentioned, and made only minor recommendations, which we immediately carried out.

At the July 2 hearing there were obviously no grounds for the continuation of the injunction, but the County Attorney asked that the hearing be post-poned until July 19 because he "had not had time to prepare the case." In the meantime, the camp had been transferred to the Highlander Folk School at Monteagle, Tenn., where it opened on schedule.

Before the July 19 hearing, we were served with another petition signed by four citizens who asked the court that they be allowed to join the county in prosecuting the case because the camps would be "a detriment to the morals of the children." These citizens employed a powerful Americus law firm to represent them.

On July 19 we appeared in court with no lawyer (we had been unable to secure local counsel). The court room was packed. The judge looked over the situation and decided that it would be a "wrangle between the Gospel and the law" (his words). He therefore ordered another postponement and told both sides to argue their case by "brief and affidavit", which means that it must be written out and submitted to him privately and then he will rule on it. The date set for getting this material to him is Sept. 20. By then the summer will be over and the purpose of the injunction accomplished, no matter who wins.

We would be quite willing to drop it there, but the County Attorney says he thinks the injunction applies to Keeneland's open door policy of having anyone visit us at any time. Because this involves a deep principle--the right of free citizens to have guests in their homes--we have decided to employ a lawyer to help us fight this through. A well-known, courageous Atlanta attorney has agreed to come to our aid. We are confident the case can be won.

On July 23 our Roadside Market was [redacted] limited, about which we have already written.

An airplane company recently refused to dust our cotton for bollweevil when they discovered that it was on "that farm."

A local fertilizer company informed us that they would not sell to us.

The auto dealer, with whom we've done business over the years and who did practically all our repair work, said he wanted our business no longer.

Several days ago State Farm Insurance Company cancelled all of our auto insurance (six policies covering liability, collision, fire, theft, etc.) Meanwhile an Atlanta insurance firm is seeking to keep our property covered and will help us get auto insurance.

A number of local ministers and leading laymen have come to us "by night" and assured us of their loving concern. In one church, after a Sunday School lesson on the persecution of early Christians, a motion was made to take up an offering to help Koinonia repair its dynamited market. This too, caused an explosion.

An amazing number of local people have gone out of their way to be friendly and to let us know that though they may not be able to agree with us, neither can they agree with the methods being used against us. The local newspaper has been surprisingly neutral and impartial. The situation is by no means all darkness. The Gospel is lying heavily upon the hearts of many people in this county. We believe that in time they will respond and join with a mighty "Thus said the LORD." Victory may be closer than we think.

Space prevents our giving more details of the physical, legal and economic pressures which are being applied to us. But we cannot close without thanking the many friends throughout the South and Nation who have rallied around us with their spiritual, moral and financial help. You have greatly encouraged and strengthened us. We shall seek to be true to you who love us and to Him who has called us and to the people who misunderstand us. Regardless of what happens to us, may our witness be clear and true, and may our hearts be free from all malice and completely filled with love and compassion.

--from all of us at Koinonia